

Dynamics of superconducting nanowires shunted with an external resistor

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We present the first study of superconducting nanowires shunted with an external resistor, geared towards understanding and controlling coherence and dissipation in nanowires. The dynamics is probed by measuring the evolution of the V - I characteristics and the distributions of switching and retrapping currents upon varying the shunt resistor and temperature. Theoretical analysis of the experiments indicates that as the value of the shunt resistance is decreased, the dynamics turns more coherent presumably due to stabilization of phase-slip centers in the wire and furthermore the switching current approaches the Bardeen's prediction for equilibrium depairing current. By a detailed comparison between theory and experimental, we make headway into identifying regimes in which the quasi-one-dimensional wire can effectively be described by a zero-dimensional circuit model analogous to the RCSJ (resistively and capacitively shunted Josephson junction) model of Stewart and McCumber. Besides its fundamental significance, our study has implications for a range of promising technological applications.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The dissipation of the supercurrent in thin superconducting wires occurs solely due to Little's phase slips [1]. Advances in fabricating ultra-narrow superconducting nanowires has greatly boosted the interest in studying phase slippage in quasi-one-dimensional superconductors [2]. There has been an intense activity to establish the existence of quantum phase slips (QPS) related to macroscopic quantum tunneling (MQT) [3–11] and to study quantum phase transitions between possibly superconducting, metallic and insulating phases in nanowires [4, 12–17]. A dissipation-controlled quantum phase transition [18–25] has been predicted in junctions of superconducting nanowires. Recently the importance of taking into account Joule-heating caused by dissipative phase-slip fluctuations has also been argued and demonstrated both theoretically and experimentally [10, 11, 26–28]. Furthermore, quantum theory shows that the QPS rate as well as the quantum phase transition can be controlled by an external shunt [23]. Dissipation plays an important role in dictating the physics of nanowires. Conversely, superconducting nanowires provide an ideal prototype for studying the interplay between coherence, dissipation and fluctuations. Besides their fundamental importance, superconducting nanowires are also ideally suited for building superconducting nano-circuitry and as devices with potentially important applications, such as superconducting qubits and current standards [29, 30]. Thus, even from the technological point of view, it is extremely important to fundamentally understand the mechanism and role of dissipation in nanowires and to find a way of experimentally controlling coherence and dissipation.

It is well established that the environmental dissipation of Josephson junction (JJ) can be controlled by externally shunting the junction [31]. This effect has

been observed in the voltage-current (V - I) characteristics, which are greatly altered by the amount of dissipation. The statistics of the switching and retrapping behavior in shunted JJs have been investigated in last three decades and continues to be actively studied [32–39]. In general, the retrapping current, which is inversely proportional to the quality factor Q of the circuit, is more sensitive to the amount of damping/dissipation than the switching current. The shunting is also known to control the rate of MQT of the phase variable in superconductor-insulator-superconductor (SIS) junctions [40–47]. The Stewart-McCumber model [48, 49] of resistively and capacitively shunted Josephson junctions (RCSJs) accurately describes much of the physics of shunted JJs [31, 50]. This model is quite useful since it allows the analysis of various fundamental aspects of superconducting devices, including chaotic behavior [51] and high-frequency microwave responses [52]. The analysis of superconducting computational circuits also involves use of the RCSJ model [53].

Shunting a superconducting nanowire with a normal resistor should have a strong effect on the superconducting character of the wire and just as in the case of JJ could potentially provide a powerful way to control coherence and dissipation. In spite of its clear importance and relevance, the behavior of shunted nanowires has not been studied previously both experimentally and theoretically. Here, we present the first study of shunted nanowires. It has been inarguably proven for the case of unshunted nanowires that going beyond linear response is essential to probe the dynamics of (quantum) phase-slip fluctuations [10, 11, 26–28]. Furthermore, most applications would require the wire to be driven out-of-equilibrium, making it doubly important to understand how the dynamics of shunted nanowires evolves upon shunting. In fact, there is a third equally important motivation for such a study. As discussed above, the RCSJ

model has been successfully used for JJs and has proven to be extremely important. However, a circuit-element representation of a superconducting nanowire is currently lacking and through this work we want to fill this gap by making some concrete advances in that direction.

The nanowires on which measurements were performed in the present work were located in a low-pressure, thermalized helium gas and were fabricated using the molecular templating method resulting in suspended nanowires [2, 4]. It had already been demonstrated that these superconducting nanowire show a large hysteresis in the V - I characteristics for the unshunted case and that this hysteresis stems from Joule heating and the strong temperature dependence of the resistance of the wire [10, 26–28]. Local Joule heating by phase-slip processes is especially important for a long free-standing nanowire because the heat generated in the bulk of the wire is not removed easily and has to flow away through the ends of the wire. Observation of similar physics in a recent study of Aluminium nanowires fabricated using a different method [11] points to the ubiquity and importance of Joule heating effects and further underlines how it can be turned into an effective probe for quantum phase slips. However, the best case scenario will be to be able to have a control over the Joule heating. As will be shown in this paper heating can indeed be controlled by shunting the superconducting nanowire with an external resistance.

The article is organized as follows. In the next Sec. II we briefly describe the sample fabrication and measurement technique. The experimental results are presented in Sec. III. This is followed by our theoretical analysis and discussion in Sec. IV where we will argue that shunting qualitatively changes the behavior of the nanowire and present the theoretical results obtained by modelling the nanowire. Finally we will end with concluding remarks in Sec. V.

II. SAMPLE FABRICATION AND MEASUREMENT TECHNIQUE

The nanowires presented in this study are fabricated using molecular templating [2, 4]. Using electron-beam lithography and a reactive ion etch, a 100 nm wide trench is patterned in the SiN layer of a Si-SiO₂-SiN substrate. The trench is then etched in a 49% solution of hydrofluoric acid to form an undercut to prevent electrical leakage between the electrodes, which are separated by the trench [54]. Fluorinated single-walled nanotubes, which are insulating, are dissolved in isopropanol and then deposited onto the substrate containing the 100 nm wide trench in the SiN layer and then dried with nitrogen gas. Randomly, some of the nanotubes cross the trench, creating a scaffold for the nanowires to form as the metal of choice is deposited on the substrate. The samples are then DC sputtered with amorphous Mo₇₆Ge₂₄ in a high vacuum ($\sim 10^{-7}$ Torr base pressure) chamber, thus coating the substrate and nanotubes with 12-18 nm of MoGe

depending on the sample. A scanning electron microscope (SEM) is then used to image the trench until a MoGe coated nanotube (nanowire) is found to be relatively straight, homogeneous, and coplanar with the electrodes [2]. An SEM image of one such nanowire is shown in the inset of Fig.2(a). Contact pads are formed using photo lithography and wet etching in a 3% solution of H₂O₂, which etches MoGe rapidly.

All of the samples studied in this paper are ~ 100 nm long and are fabricated using MoGe. The thickness of each nanowire is controlled by the deposition time in the sputtering chamber and by the configuration of nanotubes used as a scaffold. The actual width of each sample is measured from the SEM image and found to be $\sim 15, 12, 10, 15, 8,$ and 18 nm for samples S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, and S6 respectively. Thicker samples show a lower normal resistance R_n , higher critical temperature T_c , higher critical current I_c , and slightly higher retrapping current I_r . For example, for samples S1, S2 and S3 which have a decreasing thickness, the resistance R_n in the normal state and critical temperature T_c are S1 ($R_n = 1385 \Omega$, $T_c = 4.607$ K), S2 ($R_n = 1434 \Omega$, $T_c = 4.41$ K), and S3 ($R_n = 1696 \Omega$, $T_c = 3.82$ K). All samples visually show a similar behavior in the R - T and V - I curves.

The shunt has been added by attaching a commercial metal film resistor (ranging from 5 to 200 Ω) parallel to the sample using silver paste (Fig.1(b)). The distance from the nanowire to the shunt is 1-2 cm for all samples, and the shunt resistance is measured as a function of temperature down to cryogenic temperatures and found to be constant. Measurements are performed in a ^4He or ^3He cryostat equipped with base temperature silver paste and copper powder filters and room temperature π -filters. Transport measurements are carried out by current biasing the sample through a large resistor (~ 1 M Ω) and measuring the voltage with a battery-operated Stanford SR 560 preamp, using the typical film-inclusive four-probe technique as in Fig.1(b) [4]. Resistance vs. temperature (R - T) curves are measured by applying a small sinusoidal current (~ 10 -100 nA) at a frequency of ~ 12 Hz and measuring the voltage and then doing a linear fit to the resulting voltage-current data to obtain the resistance. The temperature is measured using a calibrated Cernox thermometer from LakeShore. V - I curves are measured by applying a large sinusoidal current in the range of a few μA , at a frequency of a few Hz, and measuring the voltage simultaneously. The switching (retrapping) current has been measured by sweeping the current as in the V - I measurement, and recording the current at which the voltage-jump (drop) out of the superconducting (resistive) state has been the greatest.

III. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

In this section we present a series of experimental results. We begin by presenting the temperature de-

pendence of the linear resistance of shunted nanowires and use that as a benchmark for characterizing different samples. Next, we go one step further and present the measurements of the nonlinear V - I characteristics of the current-biased nanowires at temperature of 1.8 K, focusing on the evolution of hysteresis upon shunting. In the next subsection the experimental data of switching and retrapping distributions for different values of shunt are presented. Such an analysis provides deeper insights into the dynamics of superconducting nanowires as is evident from a previous study in the case of unshunted wires[10, 27, 28]. Although the focus of our work is on studying the effect of shunting, in the last subsection we present the temperature dependence of the V - I characteristics and the switching distributions so as to provide a comparison with the corresponding measurements for the unshunted case that was studied in detail[10, 27, 28].

A. Shunt dependence of $R(T)$: characterization of the samples

Study of the linear-response resistance as a function of temperature is useful for characterizing the samples and establishing a starting point for further investigation. Fig.1(a) shows the temperature dependence of the nanowire's resistance using a log-linear scale for various values of the shunt resistance R_S . As the temperature is lowered below 5.8 K the film becomes superconducting while the wire is still resistive because its critical temperature (T_c) is lower than that of the film. Below T_c of the wire, as expected there is a measurable resistance due to phase slips in the wire.

We understand the measured resistance vs. temperature (R - T) curves using the following arguments. Below T_c of the nanowire the total sample resistance is a parallel combination of the R_S and the wire resistance, R_W . We model the wire resistance with an empirical formula,

$$\frac{1}{R_W(T)} = \frac{1}{R_n} + \frac{1}{R_{AL}(T)} \quad (3.1)$$

where R_n is the normal state resistance of the nanowire to account for the quasi-particle resistance channel and R_{AL} is the Arrhenius-Little (AL) resistance occurring due to thermally activated phase slips (TAPS). The AL resistance is estimated, following Little's proposal, by assuming that each phase slip creates a normal segment on the wire of a size equal to the coherence length and for a time interval roughly equal to the inverse attempt frequency [1, 2]. We note that the Langer-Ambegaokar-McCumber-Halperin (LAMH) theory [55, 56] of TAPS is not valid except very near to T_c [25]. So we have to use the phenomenological AL expression:

$$R_{AL}(T) = R_n \exp\left(-\frac{\Delta F(T)}{k_B T}\right),$$

where $\Delta F(T) = \frac{8\sqrt{2}}{3} \left(\frac{H_c^2(T)}{8\pi}\right) A \xi(T)$

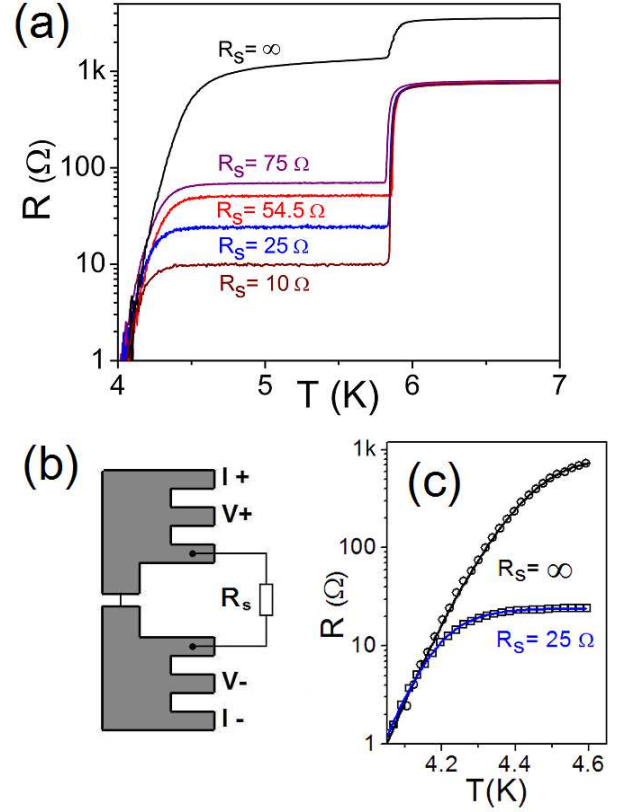


FIG. 1: (a) R - T data for sample S1 with various shunt values. The first sharp drop in resistance at 5.8 K is due to the film electrodes going superconducting. The second, gradual, drop in resistance at lower temperature is the superconducting transition of the nanowire, which is much broader due to TAPS. (b) Sample schematic. The wire is shown as a short vertical line and is shunted by a commercial resistor (R_S). The sample is measured by current biasing the sample and extracting the resistance via a four-probe measurement. (c) Comparison of R - T curves from (a) for the case of no shunt (circles) and a 25 Ω shunt (squares) with the theoretical expression of the total sample resistance given by Eq.(3.3) (solid lines). The known parameters used in each fit are: wire length, $L=105$ nm, normal state resistance, $R_n = 1385 \Omega$, and shunt resistance, $R_S = \infty$ and $R_S = 25 \Omega$, respectively. The fitting parameters used for the fits are $T_c = 4.607$ K for the unshunted case and $T_c = 4.595$ K for the 25 Ω shunted case, and $\xi(0)=7.57$ nm for both cases, where $\xi(0)$ is the dirty limit coherence length at zero temperature.

is the free energy barrier for a phase slip in the zero-bias regime [55]. Here $H_c(T)$ is the thermodynamic critical field, $\xi(T)$ is the temperature dependant coherence length, A is the cross-sectional area of the wire, and k_B is the Boltzmann constant. The equation for the free energy barrier $\Delta F(T)$ can be rewritten to include wire parameters more accessible via the experiment as [57]

$$\Delta F(T) = 0.83 k_B T_c \left(\frac{R_Q}{R_n}\right) \left(\frac{L}{\xi(0)}\right) \left(1 - \frac{T}{T_c}\right)^{3/2}, \quad (3.2)$$

where L is the length of the nanowire and $R_Q(=$

$h/4e^2 \approx 6450 \Omega$) is the quantum resistance. Thus, the temperature-dependent total sample resistance is:

$$R_T(T) = \left[\frac{1}{R_S} + \frac{1}{R_n} \left(1 + \exp\left(\frac{\Delta F(T)}{k_B T}\right) \right) \right]^{-1} \quad (3.3)$$

The fits of the total sample resistance by Eq.(3.3) are presented in Fig.1(c) for the unshunted nanowire ($R_S = \infty$), and the case when the nanowire is shunted with 25Ω . All the fits are done by using the values of R_n , T , L , and R_S obtained from the R - T curve and the SEM image and using T_c , and $\xi(0)$ as fitting parameters. The value of the fitting parameters change very slightly as the shunt resistance is varied. For instance, in the fitting presented in Fig.1(c), the value of T_c decreased by 12 mK for the shunted case compared to the unshunted case, which can be accounted for by slight sample change during thermal cycling. The agreement between experimentally measured resistance and the total resistance in Eq.(3.3), as shown in Fig.1(c), gives evidence that the T -dependence of the rate of phase slips does not depend on the shunt at relatively high temperatures ($T > 4$ K in this case) and that the observed residual resistance of the wire just below T_c is due to TAPS in the high temperature limit of $\sim 4 - 5$ K. Note also that the R - T curves of all the samples presented in this paper are smooth and show no extra transitions, and the SEM images confirm that the nanowires are homogeneous and well-connected to the electrodes. Thus our nanowires are well suited to systematically study the effect of shunting.

B. Shunt dependence of V - I characteristics

Let us start by considering the unshunted wire ($R_S = \infty$). As the bias current I is increased, thermal fluctuations cause the nanowire to switch from a superconducting state into a resistive state before the current reaches the critical (equilibrium) depairing current. The current at which the wire switches out of the superconducting state is called the switching current (I_{sw}). Once in the resistive state, as the current is decreased below some critical value of current, the nanowire experiences retrapping back into the superconducting state. The current at which this happens is called the retrapping current (I_r). For unshunted wires, switching is stochastic in nature, i.e., each new current sweep gives a different value for the switching current but the retrapping process is non-stochastic. We devote the next subsection for the discussion of switching and retrapping distributions and their dependence on the shunt resistance. Here we focus on the mean values of the switching and retrapping currents and show how they evolve upon shunting the wire as shown in Fig.2.

Fig.2(a) shows the V - I characteristics for different values of shunt resistance. As the nanowire is shunted with lower values of the shunt resistance, the mean switching and retrapping currents are increased while the width of the hysteresis is decreased. Additionally, the retrapping

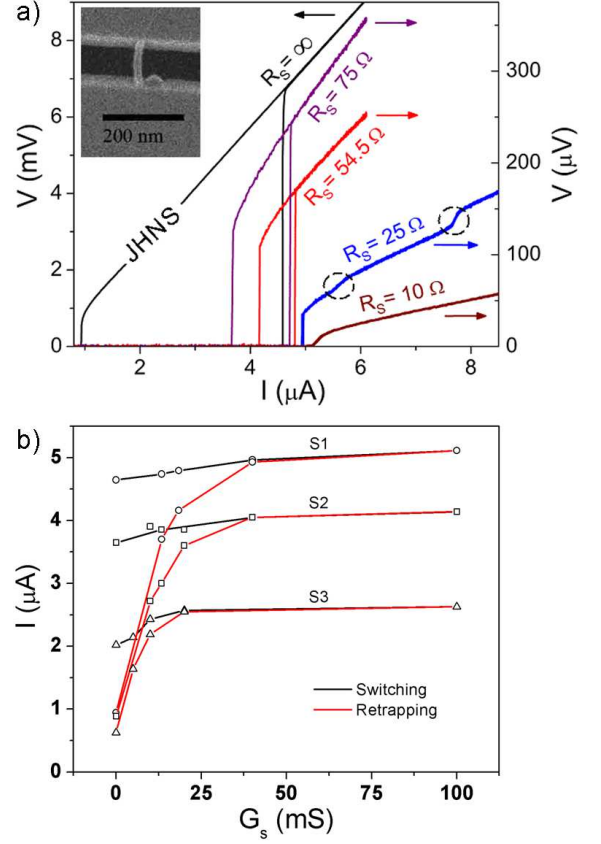


FIG. 2: (a) Voltage vs. total current for sample S1 at 1.8 K corresponding to various values of the shunt resistance, R_S . Dashed circles are kinks in the V - I curve occurring for the case when the nanowire is shunted with $R_S = 25 \Omega$. Inset: SEM image of the nanowire for sample S1. (b) Mean switching and retrapping currents vs. G_s ($\equiv 1/R_S$) for three samples (S1 at 1.8 K, S2 at 1.5 K, and S3 at 1.6 K).

current also becomes stochastic (as shown in Fig.4). In Fig.2(b), the dependence of the mean switching and retrapping currents on the shunt resistance are shown for different nanowire samples. The mean switching current increases, at a lower rate than the retrapping current, and saturates for small values of the shunt resistance (Fig.2(b)) with a decreasing (increasing) shunt resistance R_S (conductance G_s). Similarly, the retrapping current increases with decreasing the shunt resistance R_S until I_r finally reaches I_{sw} of the wire. Such behavior is observed on all tested samples. As the switching and retrapping current coincide, the hysteresis disappears. Nanowires with smaller T_c start showing this saturation behavior at higher shunt values.

When the nanowire is shunted with a 25Ω resistor or less, kinks in the voltage are also observed (they are marked by dashed line circles in Fig.2(a) for the case where sample S1 is shunted by 25Ω). The kinks for the 10Ω shunting case are not shown, but occur at higher current. We relegate the interpretation of these kinks to

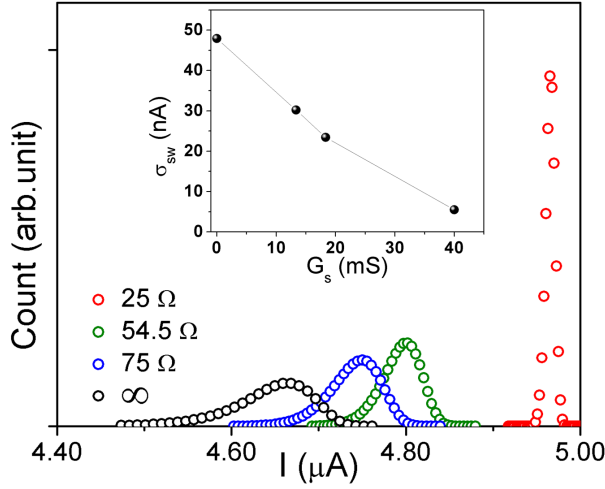


FIG. 3: Switching distributions vs. bias current for sample S1 shunted with various R_S values at 1.8 K. All distributions were measured with a sinusoidal current sweep with $f = 8$ Hz and an amplitude of $6.1 \mu\text{A}$. Inset: Shows the standard deviation σ_{sw} of switching current distribution as a function of G_s ($\equiv 1/R_S$).

Subsec. IV D.

C. Shunt dependence of switching and retrapping distributions

As mentioned in the previous subsection, the unshunted nanowire undergoes stochastic switching as the bias current is increased. We plot the switching distributions vs. current in Fig.3 for different values of external shunt resistance to see how it evolves upon shunting. Lowering the value of the shunt resistance has the effect of narrowing the width, increasing the height, and shifting the distribution to higher currents. As can be seen from the plots, the full width of the distribution at half maximum (FWHM) changed from 100 nA to 12 nA due to shunting with a 25 Ω resistor. The asymmetric shape in the distribution for larger shunts changes to a rather symmetric shape with lower shunts.

The retrapping current also shows a dramatic change from deterministic values to stochastic values when shunted with 75 Ω or less. The bottom part of Fig.4 is a typical retrapping histogram for an unshunted wire[10]. Here, the standard deviation of the retrapping current is 1.51 nA, which is the noise limit of our experimental setup. So, this small distribution of retrapping current is just due to the instrumental noise, and can be reduced by decreasing the instrumental noise and the spacing in between bias-current points. Thus, retrapping in unshunted nanowire always occurs at the same current, i.e. the transition is deterministic. However, when the wire is externally shunted, a retrapping distribution is observed, with its width being much larger than the experimental setup

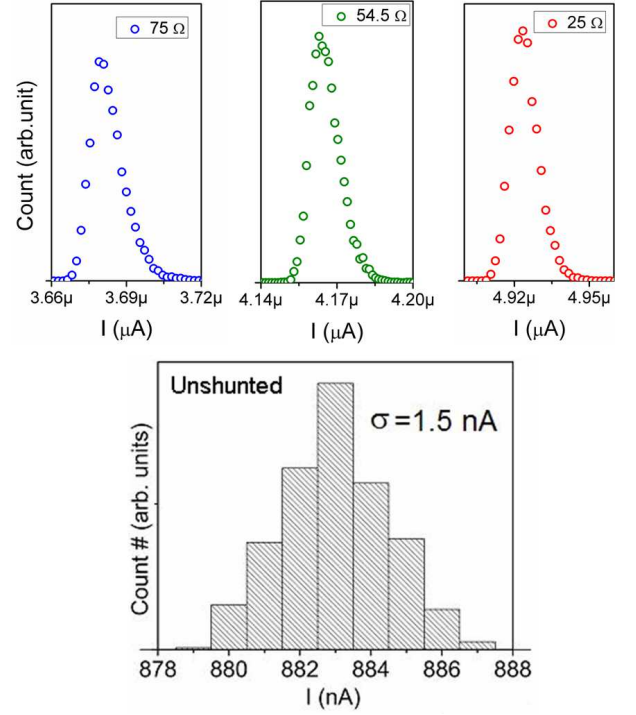


FIG. 4: Top: Retrapping distributions vs. bias current for sample S1 shunted with various R_S values. The mean and standard deviation of the retrapping data are: 3.683, 4.166, 4.925 μA and 7.304, 6.089, and 5.799 nA, respectively for $R_S = 75, 54.5, 25 \Omega$. Bottom: Typical retrapping histogram vs. I for the case where the nanowire is unshunted. The standard deviation of the retrapping current of the unshunted wire matches with the experimental current noise.

noise and independent of the bias-current spacing.

In the top of Fig.4, the retrapping current distributions for sample S1 are shown for the nanowire shunted with different values of external resistances. The width of the distribution is slightly sensitive to the value of shunt resistance, but the mean value of the retrapping current changes considerably. When shunted with 75 Ω for instance, the standard deviation of the retrapping current increases above the experimental setup noise to 7.3 nA (from 1.5 nA for the unshunted case under the same conditions). Interestingly the width of the retrapping and switching current distributions for 25 Ω shunt is almost similar. The retrapping distributions for the shunted nanowire are asymmetric in contrast to the unshunted case in which the distribution is symmetric as can be seen in the bottom of Fig.4.

D. Temperature dependence: shunted vs. unshunted nanowires

In this subsection we discuss the temperature evolution of the dynamics of shunted nanowires. In Fig.5(a), the mean value of the switching current is plotted at various

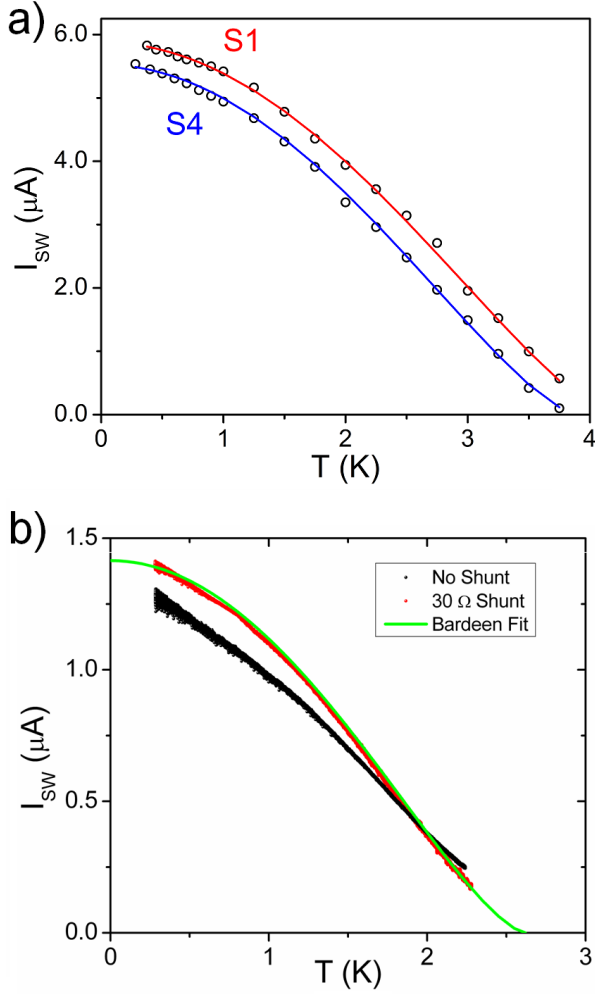


FIG. 5: (a) Mean I_{sw} vs. T for samples S1 and S4 shunted with 5 Ω and 10 Ω respectively. The solid lines are fits to the Bardeen's prediction (Eq.3.4) for the temperature dependence of the depairing current, I_c . The fitting parameters used are: $I_{c0} = 5.88, 5.53 \mu A$ and $T_c = 4.2, 3.9 K$ for samples S1 and S4, respectively. (b) Distribution of I_{sw} vs. T for sample S5 unshunted (red) and shunted with 30 Ω (black). Each curve contains approximately 20,000 points. The corresponding fit to the Bardeen prediction (green) is presented for the shunted wire. Here $I_{c0} = 1.415 \mu A$ and $T_c = 2.62 K$.

temperatures for sample S1 shunted with 5 Ω and sample S4 shunted with 10 Ω . In Fig.5(b), a distribution of switching currents is plotted as a function of temperature for sample S5 when it is shunted with a 30 Ω resistor and compared with the unshunted case. As the temperature is reduced, the switching current for all samples increases and begins to show signs of saturation below 1 K. The behavior of the switching current as a function of temperature in the distribution measurement in Fig.5(b) is similar to that of Fig.5(a) except that in Fig.5(b) the fluctuation in the switching current is also displayed.

To check the proximity of the switching current to

the equilibrium depairing current, Bardeen's prediction [58] for the temperature dependence of the equilibrium critical (depairing) current is compared to the temperature dependence of the measured switching current for nanowires shunted with small resistances as shown in Fig.5. The Bardeen's equation, derived from BCS theory, is given by:

$$I_c(T) = I_{c0} \left(1 - \left(\frac{T}{T_c} \right)^2 \right)^{3/2} \quad (3.4)$$

where I_{c0} is the critical current at zero temperature. Excellent agreement is found with the experimental data over a wide temperature interval suggesting that the shunt has driven the switching current close to the depairing current. In these fits, the temperature is known while the critical current at zero temperature I_{c0} and the critical temperature T_c are used as fitting parameters. Close agreement is found between the theoretical prediction for the depairing current at zero temperature: $I_{c0} = 92 \mu A (L T_c) / R_n \xi(0)$ [57], which is derived from BCS and Ginzburg-Landau theory, and the value of I_{c0} used in the Bardeen fit. Here L and $\xi(0)$ are in nm, T_c in K, and R_n in Ω . Using the fitting parameters from the $R_T(T)$ fit of Eq.(3.3) presented in Fig.1(c), I_{c0} has a theoretical value of 5.48 μA , while I_{c0} used in fitting to the Bardeen formula in Fig.5 has a value of 5.88 μA . Thus, excellent agreement is found between the theoretical and experimental value for I_{c0} . A value of 4.2 K for T_c is used to fit the temperature dependence of the switching current with the Bardeen formula, while the $R_T(T)$ fit using the AL model predicts the value of T_c to be 4.717 K. This difference can be accounted for by sample oxidation and thermal cycling between measurements.

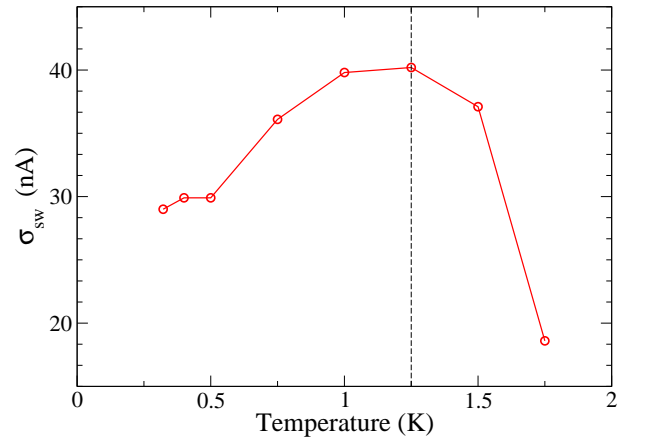


FIG. 6: The standard deviation σ_{sw} vs. T for the switching events of sample S6 shunted with 10 Ω , where for each point σ was calculated using data sets of 10000 points.

Finally in Fig.6, we plot the measured temperature dependence of the switching distribution width for the shunted nanowires. We find that it shows a trend similar to that previously observed for the unshunted wire[10]. As for the retrapping current, which is observed to be

stochastic only in the shunted nanowire, the standard deviation is never observed to increase with decreasing temperature. However, at low temperatures, MQT is expected to cause the standard deviation of the retrapping current to be constant with temperature [59]. In our experiments, we have seen evidence of this behavior and will investigate this more fully in the future.

IV. THEORETICAL ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this section we will develop a theoretical interpretation and understanding of the experimental data presented in the previous section. In doing so, we will start by giving a brief account of the unshunted nanowires which have been previously investigated in detail. Then we will argue how shunting the nanowires brings about qualitative changes in the dynamics and develop a physical picture by gathering experimental signatures and theoretical arguments. Next we will motivate the theoretical model for explicit calculations and numerical simulations and use it to generate the V - I characteristics and the distributions that will be compared with experimental measurements.

A. Unshunted nanowires

Recently, properties such as the V - I characteristics and the switching distributions of the unshunted nanowire have been studied in detail to understand the behavior of quasi-one-dimensional superconductors at low temperatures [10, 11, 27, 28]. In quasi-one-dimensional superconductors the zero resistance superconducting state is destabilized by thermal and quantum phase-slip fluctuations. These phase-slip fluctuations induce resistance which causes Joule heating in the nanowire. If this heat generated by phase-slip fluctuations in the bulk of the wire is not overcome sufficiently rapidly, it can reduce the depairing current to below the applied current, thus causing transition to the highly resistive state. It has been found in experiments with unshunted nanowire that while the distribution of re-trapping currents is very narrow and almost temperature-independent, the distribution of switching currents is relatively broad and the mean as well as the width of the distribution change with temperature of the leads. The distribution in switching currents reflects that the collective dynamics of the superconducting condensate evolves stochastically in time and undergoes phase slip events at random instants. A stochastic model for the time-evolution of the temperature in a nanowire has been developed to understand above experimental results [27, 28]. The model predicts that although, in general, switching from superconducting to resistive normal state occurs due to several phase-slip events, it can be even induced by a single phase slip at a particular tempera-

ture and current-range. The model also indicates non-monotonic temperature dependence of the width of the distribution of switching currents. Thus, these experiments with switching events as well as those with microwave radiation in unshunted wires suggest that the resistive state is the normal state of the wire maintained by Joule heating, i.e. the JHNS [10, 11, 26, 60]. For unshunted wires, the retrapping process is non-stochastic since the retrapping occurs from the thermalized Joule heating state.

B. Qualitative picture of shunt-induced crossover

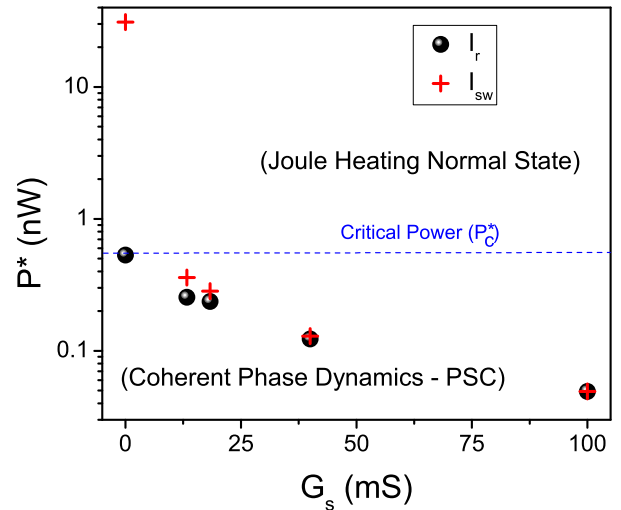


FIG. 7: Log-linear plot of average power dissipated in the nanowire immediately after a switching event (crosses) and just before retrapping (circles), plotted versus the shunting conductance ($= 1/R_s$). Above a critical power, P_c^* , the resistive state of the nanowire is identified as the JHNS while below P_c^* , the resistive state originates from a coherent phase dynamics. The power is calculated by taking the voltage across the wire times the current through the wire ($P^* = I_W V$) at the retrapping and switching current in the resistive branch of the V - I curve from Fig.2(a).

How does the picture for the unshunted case discussed above evolve as we shunt the wire with an external resistance? With the inclusion of a shunt resistance the applied bias current is divided into two parts, and the part going through the nanowire decreases as the shunt resistance becomes smaller. A lower (higher) current through the wire causes a decrease (increase) in Joule heating in the wire and hence a decrease (increase) in local temperature. For the unshunted case that corresponds to an infinite shunt resistance, the heating is maximum and as discussed in the previous subsection one gets a JHNS in the unshunted wire.

We will argue that upon decreasing the value of the shunt resistance the nature of the resistive state of the nanowire changes from a JHNS to a phase slip center

(PSC) state. PSC is a process of periodic-in-time phase rotation occurring in a certain region of the wire and is driven by the bias current. An ideal PSC acts qualitatively like a weak-link JJ in series with the rest of the wire, and the differential resistance associated with it is determined by the quasiparticle diffusion length [61]. This resistance is much smaller than the normal resistance of the wire. This is what we indeed obtain when the nanowires are shunted with small resistance. The most explicit proof for a PSC would of course be the observation of Shapiro steps, because they prove that there is a periodic phase rotation in the system. However we have compelling arguments and consistency in our explanation that points to the existence of PSC.

The deterministic retrapping current observed for the unshunted nanowires becomes stochastic when an external resistive shunt is added (at least within the experimental range of shunt resistances). The deterministic retrapping current reflects that the resistive state of the unshunted wires is a thermalized JHNS. There is overheating and the wire is normal. As I is reduced the temperature goes down. Relative fluctuations of the temperature are small since it is determined by a macroscopic number of normal electrons. In this case I_r is fixed by the current at which the heating is not enough to keep the system above T_c . If the system must re-trap at I_r^0 then as can be seen in Fig.4, the distribution is symmetric and Gaussian, centered around I_r^0 , and as wide as the noise in the bias current circuit and in the measurement circuit can smear it. On the other hand, the stochastic retrapping current indicates that the finite-voltage/resistive state of the shunted wires is governed by a coherent dynamics of the phase of superconducting order parameter. The dynamic state, called PSC moves by inertia, which is the voltage on the electrodes. But a strong thermal (or quantum) fluctuation can re-trap the system from the dynamic to the static state. And such change will be permanent. So the retrapping can happen at $I > I_r^0$. The distribution is asymmetric (right-skewed or right-tailed) since the system can never switch at $I < I_r^0$. Here, the fluctuation-free retrapping current I_r^0 is the current value at which the friction must stop the dynamic state in all cases (this is the property of the model considered). Similarly, the fluctuations in the low-resistance ‘superconducting’ state as discussed in the previous subsection for the unshunted case can allow for premature switching at $0 < I < I_{sw}^0 \equiv I_{c0}$ but never at $I > I_{sw}^0$ since the system cannot move through I_{sw}^0 without a switch (the bias current I is assumed to grow linearly in time). One again has an asymmetric distribution, this time left-skewed or left-tailed. Overall, we can use the shape of the distribution to gain insights into nature of the state from which retrapping or switching happens.

In Fig.7, a phase diagram for sample S1 is presented which demonstrates the conditions necessary for the resistive state to be either the JHNS or a coherent phase dynamics state such as a PSC. The power $P^* = I_W V$

at switching and retrapping is calculated by taking the product of the current through the wire and voltage across the wire at which the system exhibits switching and retrapping, respectively. Here, $I_W = I - \frac{V}{R_S}$, where I is the total current, which obeys Kirchhoff’s Law for current conservation ($I = I_{shunt} + I_W$, where I_{shunt} is the current through the shunt). The critical power, P_c^* , is defined as the minimum power the wire can sustain and still remain in the JHNS and is calculated from the power that the unshunted nanowire exhibits at retrapping. For sample S1, P_c^* is calculated to be 0.533 nW from the unshunted curve in Fig.2(a). At switching, the unshunted wire experiences 31 nW of heating, which puts it in the JHNS, where it remains until the current is reduced below the retrapping current.

With an included shunt, the Joule heating power in the wire at switching is reduced. For example, when shunted with 75 Ω , the Joule heating power at switching is 0.359 nW (compared to 31 nW for the unshunted wire), which is lower than P_c^* . Thus, the wire switches to the PSC, which is a superconducting dynamic state (and not the normal state), and as the current is reduced, it remains in it until retrapping occurs. Because retrapping occurs from the phase coherent state, stochastic retrapping is expected for sample S1 when shunted with (from the experimentally examined values) a 75 Ω resistor or less. Some heating is also to be expected since the power at retrapping is still comparable to P_c^* .

Guided by the qualitative picture developed above, in the next subsection we will discuss a model that we will use for simulating the dynamics of the nanowire. In Subsec. IV D we will address the kinks seen in Fig.2(a) and argue that they further support the existence of a coherent phase dynamic state or a PSC for shunted nanowires.

C. Theoretical model for shunted nanowires

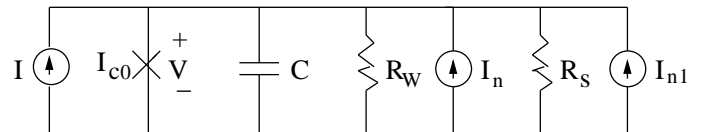


FIG. 8: Circuit of the resistively capacitively shunted nanowire with an external shunt resistance R_S and the Johnson-Nyquist current-noises I_n , I_{n1} .

As argued in the previous subsection, shunting changes the high-resistance state from JHNS to a state with coherent phase dynamics or PSC. When the value of the shunt resistance is small, we expect that the dynamics of the nanowire can be modelled by an effectively zero-dimensional circuit model as is done in the case of a JJ given that the PSC behaves like a JJ in series with the wire. For unshunted nanowires (i.e. infinite shunt value) heating is important and as discussed above the dynamics of the nanowire is dictated by a model stemming from a

heat diffusion equation. For very large shunt values some elements of this model might still be important. However, the point of view we take is to simulate the dynamics of shunted nanowires using a circuit-element representation and see how well we can reproduce the experimentally observed behavior.

As discussed in the introduction, the RCSJ model of Stewart and McCumber has been greatly successful in understanding the physics of JJs. So our goal is to adopt and extend this model to reflect the experimental set-up and measurements for the nanowires considered in this paper. The model of Stewart and McCumber was originally introduced for superconducting JJs to study dc V - I curves displaying hysteresis for light damping [48, 49]. This model considered only the time varying phase difference $\phi(t)$ of the superconducting wave-functions in the weakly coupled superconductors and neglected any spatial variations of the superconducting wave-functions and is essentially zero-dimensional. We add an external shunt resistance in parallel with the superconducting junction in the RCSJ model to be able to study the behavior for different values of external shunt resistance as has been studied experimentally. We then simulate the extended RCSJ model with the Johnson-Nyquist Gaussian white thermal noise coming from the resistive parts of the circuit. We have not included external noise in our simulation. Before presenting the details of the model, we pause to provide some examples of analogies of the observed nanowire behavior with the established behavior in JJ to further motivate the use of a RCSJ kind of model for the case of a shunted wire.

The hysteresis in underdamped JJs is due to the bistability of the phase point in the tilted wash-board potential which depends nonlinearly on the bias current [31]. Damping plays an important role in dictating the dynamics of the JJ. The experimentally observed saturation of I_{sw} at low shunt values as presented in Section. III can be interpreted to be an effect of high damping (damping $\sim Q^{-1} \sim R_S^{-1}$) on the premature switching process, and it indicates that the depairing current is nearly reached for these low values of the shunt. Another experimental observation we presented earlier is that below some critical shunt value, the retrapping and switching current become equal and the hysteresis vanishes. For instance, for sample S1 at 1.8 K at a shunt value of 10 Ω , the V - I curve becomes non-hysteretic as in Fig. 2(a), and there is no abrupt switch into the resistive state. This can be interpreted in analogy to JJ as follows: At some critical value of the shunt, the increased damping changes the system from an underdamped junction (with hysteresis) to an overdamped junction (without hysteresis). In JJs, this transition occurs when $Q \approx 0.84$ [38]. the third example of analogy with JJs is that the mean value of the retrapping current changes considerably upon changing the value of the shunt resistance. Indeed it is well-known for JJs that retrapping is very sensitive to the value of damping and the fluctuation free retrapping current is inversely proportional to the resistance associated with

the JJ.

We give a brief summary of the physics of the RCSJ model in Appendix A and focus on discussing the details of our extended RCSJ model below. The displacement current and “normal” losses (e.g. quasiparticle tunnel currents) in the nanowire are included in the model by the shunting capacitance C and resistance R_W , respectively. We also include a Johnson-Nyquist type Gaussian white noise current source I_n associated with the resistance R_W along with the drive current source I [62, 63]. Next we extend the RCSJ model with an external normal resistance R_S and corresponding Johnson-Nyquist Gaussian white current noise I_{n1} for the present experimental set-up of a shunted nanowire (see Fig.8). Then, the reduced equation of motion for the phase difference is given by (check Appendix A for a derivation)

$$Q_0^2 \frac{d^2\phi}{dt'^2} + \left(1 + \frac{R_W}{R_S}\right) \frac{d\phi}{dt'} + \sin\phi = i + i_n + i_{n1}, \quad (4.1)$$

where $Q_0 = (2eI_{c0}R_W^2C/\hbar)^{1/2}$ is the quality factor, $i = I/I_{c0}$ is the normalized dc bias current, $i_n = I_n/I_{c0}$, $i_{n1} = I_{n1}/I_{c0}$ are the normalized noise currents, $t' = (2eI_{c0}R_W/\hbar)t$ where t is the physical time associated with the circuit in Fig.8. Here I_{c0} is the fluctuation-free critical current of the nanowire. The time-averaged steady-state voltage across the wire, $V = I_{c0}R_W\langle d\phi/dt' \rangle$, and the noise autocorrelations are

$$\langle i_n(t'_1) \rangle = 0, \quad \langle i_{n1}(t'_1) \rangle = 0$$

$$\langle i_n(t'_1)i_n(t'_2) \rangle = \frac{4ek_BT_W}{\hbar I_{c0}} \delta(t'_1 - t'_2), \quad (4.2)$$

$$\langle i_{n1}(t'_1)i_{n1}(t'_2) \rangle = \frac{4ek_BT_S}{\hbar I_{c0}} \frac{R_W}{R_S} \delta(t'_1 - t'_2), \quad (4.3)$$

where $\langle \rangle$ denotes averaging over the noise realizations (noise ensemble). The temperature of the nanowire and the shunt resistance are T_W and T_S , respectively. It is possible that the temperature of the wire is different from that of the shunt resistance, so we keep here two different noises coming from two different resistances. The relations in Eqs.(4.2,4.3) are known as fluctuation-dissipation relations. Now if we assume that there is not significant MQT at the temperature (1.8 K) where the distributions for the switching current I_{sw} and the retrapping current I_r are measured, then the distributions are due to the thermal fluctuations arising from the Johnson-Nyquist current noises associated with the resistive parts of the circuit.

One can write the Eq.(4.1) in a little different form as

$$Q^2 \frac{d^2\phi}{dt'^2} + \frac{d\phi}{dt'} + \sin\phi = i + i_n + i_{n1}, \quad (4.4)$$

where $Q = (2eI_{c0}R_T^2C/\hbar)^{1/2}$, $t' = (2eI_{c0}R_T/\hbar)t$ and $1/R_T = 1/R_W + 1/R_S$ are respectively the quality factor and the resistance of the full circuit. But the above form of Eq.(4.1) is more useful in simulations.

D. Shunt dependence of V - I characteristics

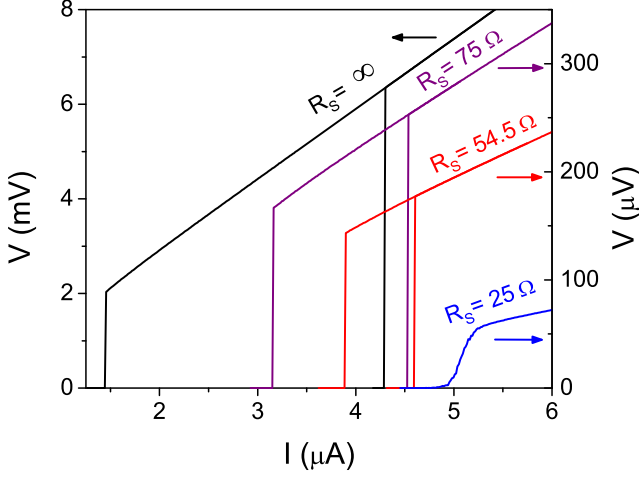


FIG. 9: Voltage-current characteristics of the nanowire with external shunt resistance and current noise. The quality factor $Q_0 = 7$ and the temperatures are related by $T_W = T_S = T \sim 1.8$ K and constant $I_{c0} = 5.55 \mu\text{A}$. The resistance of the unshunted nano-wire $R_n = 1385 \Omega$, and the resistance of the phase-slip center (or shunted nano-wire) $R_{\text{PSC}} \sim 0.1R_n$.

Now we simulate Eq.(4.1) for $T_W = T_S = T_{\text{electrode}}$ to calculate the voltage-current characteristics of the shunted nanowire in the presence of the current noises from the normal resistances. In the experiment, one changes the bias current with a finite current sweep rate, and measures the corresponding voltages. In the simulation, instead we first fix a bias current and then integrate the above equations of motion (with suitable initial conditions and current noises) for a sufficiently long time (this time is the relaxation time or the transient time), and next calculate the time-averaged voltage by averaging $d\phi/dt'$ over some time interval. For forward current sweep we choose the initial conditions, $\phi(t' = 0) = 0, \frac{d\phi}{dt'}(t' = 0) = 0$; and for the backward current sweep we use $\phi(t' = 0) \neq 0, \frac{d\phi}{dt'}(t' = 0) \neq 0$. The initial values of $\phi(t')$ and $\frac{d\phi}{dt'}(t')$ for the backward current sweep can be any finite non-zero values in the resistive state of the system as after long time of transient dynamics the exact initial values of $\phi(t')$ and $\frac{d\phi}{dt'}(t')$ are irrelevant. We generate the Gaussian white noises i_n and i_{n1} at each time step of the simulation satisfying the noise properties in Eqs.(4.2, 4.3) following the method described in [64].

The voltage-current characteristics are plotted in Fig.9 for the shunted wires with different values of the normal resistance of the wire and the shunt resistance. As can be seen from the Eqs.(4.1,A5), we really do not need explicit values of the resistances in simulation, but we only need the ratios of the two resistances and a quality factor. We have checked that for the quality factor $Q_0 = 7$ and at a specific temperature 1.8 K, the transition from hys-

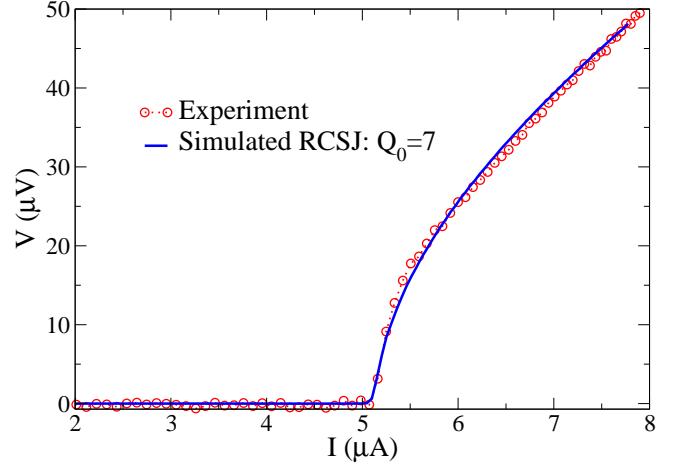


FIG. 10: Comparison of the voltage-current characteristics of the shunted nanowire with $R_S = 10 \Omega$ from the experiment and simulation. We find the best agreement from the simulation of the shunted nanowire for a quality factor $Q_0 = 7$ and temperature $T_W = T_S = T \sim 0.13$ K, $I_{c0} = 5.15 \mu\text{A}$, and a resistance of phase-slip center (or shunted nanowire) $R_{\text{PSC}} = 85 \Omega$.

teretic to non-hysteretic behavior occurs near the ratio $R_W : R_S = 4 : 1$. As discussed in the previous subsection, our present theory with a coherent phase relationship suits us best to analyze the nanowires shunted with low shunt resistance, i.e., in the PSC regime. A comparison between Fig.2(a) and Fig.9 shows a very good qualitative agreement between the experimental V - I curves and those from simulations. We also have good quantitative agreement between the experiment and simulation for the V - I curves of the shunted nanowires (PSC regime) with small resistances. This is shown in Fig.10 for the shunted nanowire case where $R_S = 10 \Omega$. We find the best agreement between the experimental and simulated V - I curves for the low shunt resistances when the effective temperature (related to the thermal noise) of the simulated nanowires is much lower than the temperature of the superconducting electrodes in the experiment. Therefore the fluctuation in I_{sw} due to thermal noise is expected to be small as we find in experiment. The reason for such effective thermal noise reduction is not completely clear. It might be due to the inductance of the shunt resistance. The inductance can cut-off some of the higher-frequency thermal noise, thus reducing the standard deviation of the noise current. It also confirms that Joule heating in the shunted nanowires for lower shunt resistance is greatly reduced compared to the unshunted case. The resistance of the shunted nanowires R_W which enters in the simulation through Eqs.4.1, 4.3 is used as a fitting parameter here. It is necessary to choose it to be much smaller than the normal resistance of the nanowire R_n to have the best fitted of V - I curves. This is a strong indication that the shunt resistance drives the nanowire to a phase-coherent PSC state, in which the time-average supercurrent is not much smaller than the total bias cur-

rent. Thus we introduce a new notation for the wire resistance, namely R_{PSC} . This quantity represents the value of the wire resistance that we have to put in our model in order to produce the best fits to the experimental V - I curves. We find that $R_{\text{PSC}} \ll R_n$. For example, we find $R_{\text{PSC}} = 85 \, \Omega$ from the simulation for $R_S = 10 \, \Omega$ case. Here we remind that the normal resistance of the nanowire is $R_n = 1385 \, \Omega$.

In the experimental V - I curve of the shunted nanowire with shunt resistor $25 \, \Omega$ there are kinks which we do not find in simulations. The kinks can be attributed to the effects of a shunt inductance in series with the shunt resistor. These kinks are not associated with resonance in the system because such a resonance would not depend on temperature as these do. Such inductive effects originate from the fact that the resistor used for shunting has dimensions of a few centimeters and so has a large inductance ($\sim 20 \, \text{nH}$). Inductance connected in series with a shunt resistor is known to cause similar kinks in the V - I curves of shunted JJs due to a complicated dynamic of the phase difference on the junction [65]. Thus, the observation of such kinks confirms that the resistive state in our shunted wires is due to a phase-coherent PSC [31] and not due to Joule heating. Thus we find another indication that by resistively shunting the nanowire it is possible to change the nature of its resistive state from a phase-incoherent JHNS to a phase-coherent PSC state.

E. Shunt dependence of switching and retrapping distributions

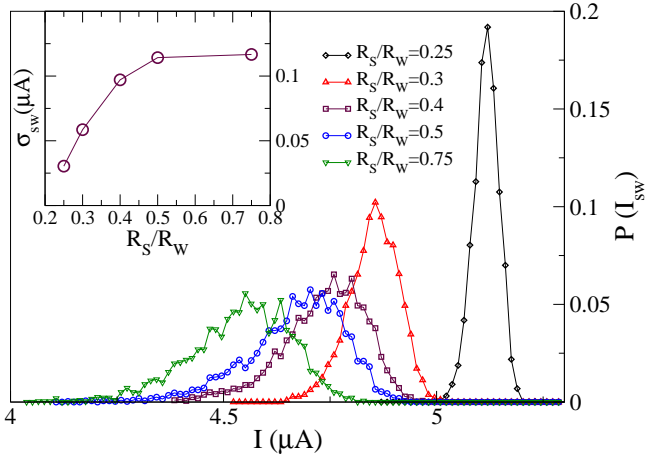


FIG. 11: Simulated distribution $P(I_{\text{sw}})$ of the switching current I_{sw} for different R_S/R_W values at temperature $T_W = T_S = 1.8 \, \text{K}$, constant $I_{c0} = 5.55 \, \mu\text{A}$. The quality factor $Q_0 = 7$. Inset: Shows the standard deviation σ_{sw} of switching current distribution as a function of R_S/R_W .

We first calculate the distributions $P(I_{\text{sw}})$ of the switching current (I_{sw}) in the shunted nanowire for the same temperature $T_W = T_S = T_{\text{electrode}}$. We again simulate Eq.(4.1) as before by changing the bias current with

zero as initial values for ϕ and $\frac{d\phi}{dt}$, but now we repeat the full procedure for many realizations of the thermal noise. We count a switch from the metastable to the running state when the nanowire spends more than half the time in the running state over some sufficiently long time period (τ_s) of simulation. This gives us a distribution for I_{sw} which is plotted in Fig.11 for the shunted wire. We find a good qualitative agreement between the simulation and experiment for the switching distributions of the shunted nanowires as shown in Fig.3 and Fig.11. In the inset of Fig.11 we show the standard deviation σ_{sw} of the simulated $P(I_{\text{sw}})$ with R_S/R_W and it matches with the trend of the standard deviation of the measured $P(I_{\text{sw}})$ from the experiment. Here we mention that σ_{sw} shows a non-monotonic behavior with R_S/R_W in the RCSJ model for higher values of R_S , for example, $R_S > R_W$ at a constant temperature. This non-monotonic behavior of σ_{sw} in the RCSJ model with R_S/R_W at a constant temperature is similar to non-monotonic behavior of σ_{sw} with temperature for a constant R_S/R_W . It will be discussed in the last subsection. However, experimental results show the value of σ_{sw} is greater for the unshunted case ($R_S = \infty$) than the shunted case. This also indicates that the unshunted nanowire is not in a coherent PSC state but is dominated by Joule heating which increases the effective temperature of the wire.

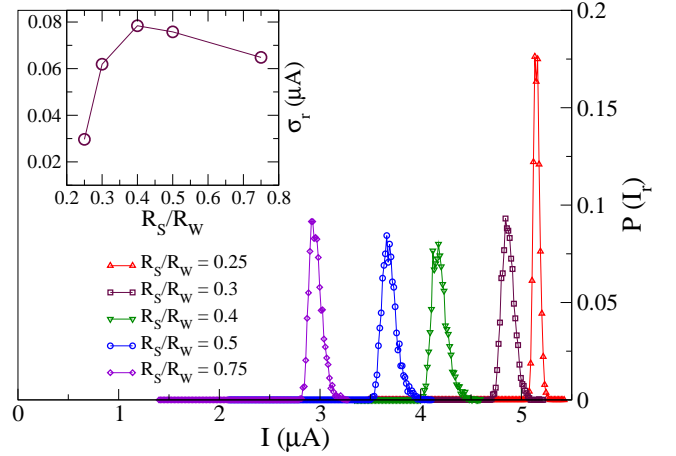


FIG. 12: Simulated distribution $P(I_r)$ of the retrapping current I_r for different R_S/R_W values at temperatures $T_W = T_S = 1.8 \, \text{K}$, constant $I_{c0} = 5.55 \, \mu\text{A}$. The quality factor $Q_0 = 7$. Inset: Shows the standard deviation σ_r of the retrapping current distribution as a function of R_S/R_W .

We next simulate the extended RCSJ model to understand the measured distributions $P(I_r)$ of the retrapping current for different shunt resistances. Here we choose a fixed temperature. The simulation method is similar to finding the switching distributions, but now we start from a PSC state with nonzero initial conditions for $\phi(0)$ and $\frac{d\phi}{dt}(0)$. We reduce the bias current and count a retrapping event from the running to metastable state when the nanowire spends less than half of the time in the running state over time period of τ_s . The simulated re-

trapping distributions are plotted in Fig.12 for different R_S/R_W values at a constant temperature. We find from Fig.4 that the standard deviation of the retrapping current distributions falls slightly (within the experimental noise limit) with decreasing shunt resistance. The standard deviation of the simulated retrapping current distribution also falls slightly below $R_S/R_W \sim 0.4$ for $Q_0 = 7$ which is similar to the experiment. But we also find from the simulation of the RCSJ model that the standard deviation of $P(I_r)$ decays slightly with increasing shunt resistance above $R_S/R_W \sim 0.4$ for $Q_0 = 7$, but it never goes to zero at higher shunt resistances for the RCSJ model with coherent dynamics. The standard deviation of the measured retrapping current distribution for the unshunted wire is almost zero within the noise limit; this is consistent with the existence of JHNS in the unshunted nanowire and PSCs in shunted wires. The width of the simulated switching and retrapping distributions are much greater than the experimental results at the same temperature $T = 1.8$ K. This might be again due to the inductance of the shunt resistor which can effectively reduce the thermal noise in the system.

F. Temperature dependence: shunted vs. unshunted nanowires

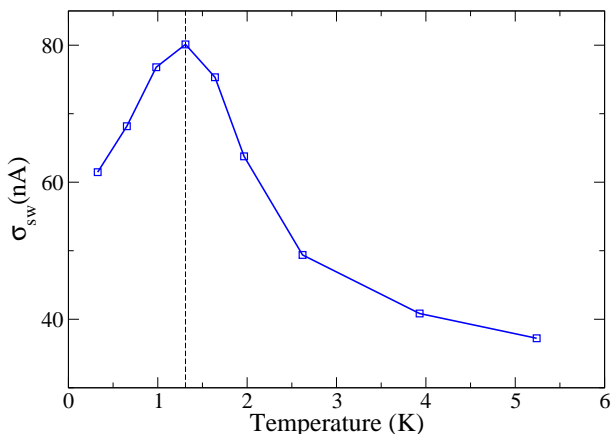


FIG. 13: The standard deviation σ_{sw} vs. T for the simulated switching events in the RCSJ model with $Q_0 = 7$ and $R_S/R_W = 0.3$.

Finally we simulate the extended RCSJ model with an external low shunt resistance to find the temperature dependence of the standard deviation σ_{sw} of switching current. We use the same scheme as previous sub-sections to determine the switching current in the simulation at different temperatures. We plot σ_{sw} vs. T in Fig.13 for $R_S/R_W = 0.3$ and $Q_0 = 7$. We find that temperature dependence of simulated σ_{sw} due to the thermal fluctuations is non-monotonic just as in the experiment (see Fig.6) for the shunted nanowires. A non-monotonic temperature dependence of σ_{sw} due to the thermal fluctuations

has also been obtained previously for various JJs [36–38] and our theoretical analysis not only highlights its ubiquity but also provides a way of obtaining it in terms of a RCSJ kind of modelling. We also find a non-monotonic temperature dependence of the standard deviation of retrapping current in our simulation. In our numerical study here we only consider effect of thermal fluctuations in phase-slips, thus one needs to go beyond the present study to include effect of macroscopic quantum tunneling on the temperature dependence of σ_{sw} in the fully quantum regime.

In unshunted nanowires too it has been shown that the standard deviation of the switching current distribution is non-monotonic as a function of temperature [27, 28]. In the thermal regime at higher temperatures $T > T^*$ multiple phase slips are required before the wire switches to the normal state and the standard deviation increases as the temperature is decreased [10]. At slightly lower temperatures $T < T^*$ a single thermal phase slip causes the wire to switch to the normal state and the standard deviation decreases with a decrease in temperature. At low temperatures when QPS are present, depending on how T^* compares with the temperature of crossover from TAPS to the QPS, one can get different behaviors. With an applied external shunt, the increased dissipation is expected to decrease the temperature at which the crossover from thermal activation to MQT takes place.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have undertaken a detailed study of the effect of external resistance shunts on the behavior of superconducting nanowires. Shunting has a strong effect on the behavior of the nanowire. We find that the statistics of the switching and retrapping currents significantly depends on the value of the shunt resistance. The temperature dependence of the mean switching current in strongly shunted nanowires is consistent with the Bardeen prediction for the temperature dependence of the critical current [58]; this indicates that the switching current can be controllably driven very near to the depairing current through external resistive shunting. The retrapping current on the other hand increases and becomes more stochastic, at least for moderate shunting. We demonstrate that the shunting, even with a large resistance value, can be used to control the phase slip events in the wire. We suggest a model based on the Stewart-McCumber RCSJ model, which is generalized to include two resistive elements, corresponding to the effective resistance of the wire (with a phase slip center), and the resistance of the shunt. The model provides a semi-quantitative description to the data. Moreover, it provides insights into developing a circuit-element representation of a superconducting nanowire.

Our work opens up many interesting avenues towards developing a fundamental understanding and control of coherence and dissipation in nanowires as well as its rela-

tion to possible quantum phase transitions. It will be important to develop a model that incorporates heating as well as coherent dynamics and studies the entire crossover in going from unshunted nanowires (i.e. infinite shunt resistance in parallel) where heating is most important to the case of very low shunt resistance values where heating is least important. It would be extremely interesting and relevant also to explore the low temperature quantum regime in more detail and to study the implications of our work for quantum computing and other technological applications of nanowires. As an example, nanowires have been used as photon counters [66], which are important in radioastronomy. The switching events studied in this paper, represent so-called “dark counts”, in the terminology of the photon detection community. Understanding the physics of dark counts is important for the purpose of improving superconducting photon detectors. The fact that the standard deviation of switching current becomes smaller with the inclusion of a shunt resistor has relevance to photon detectors, since dark counts can be reduced by shunting.

VI. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Appendix A: Resistively and capacitively shunted Josephson junction (RCSJ) model

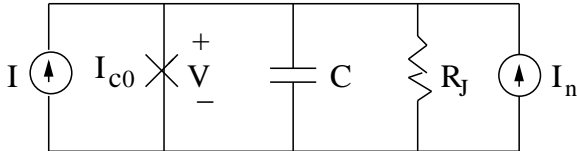


FIG. 14: Stewart-McCumber resistively and capacitively shunted Josephson junction (RCSJ) model with the Johnson-Nyquist thermal current noise.

Here we briefly digress the main features of the RCSJ model (see Fig.14) introduced by Stewart and McCum-

ber [48, 49]. We find the equation of motion for the time varying phase difference $\phi(t)$ of the superconducting wave-functions of the circuit in Fig.14 by applying the well-known Josephson dc and ac relations [67–69] for the current-phase ($I - \phi$) and the voltage-phase ($V - \phi$),

$$I_J = I_{c0} \sin \phi, \quad (A1)$$

$$\frac{d\phi}{dt} = \frac{2eV}{\hbar}, \quad (A2)$$

where I_{c0} is the fluctuation-free intrinsic critical current of the junction. The equation of motion for $\phi(t)$ of the circuit in Fig.14 is given by,

$$\frac{C\hbar}{2e} \frac{d^2\phi}{dt^2} + \frac{\hbar}{2eR_J} \frac{d\phi}{dt} + I_{c0} \sin \phi = I + I_n, \quad (A3)$$

along with the Gaussian white noise properties for the Johnson-Nyquist thermal current noise I_n ,

$$\begin{aligned} \langle I_n(t) \rangle &= 0 \\ \langle I_n(t_1) I_n(t_2) \rangle &= \frac{2k_B T_J}{R_J} \delta(t_1 - t_2), \end{aligned} \quad (A4)$$

where T_J is the temperature of the JJ with capacitance C and resistance R_J . The resistance R_J measures dissipation in the JJ in the finite voltage regime, without affecting the lossless dc zero voltage regime, and C indicates the geometric shunting capacitance between the two superconducting electrode [31]. The Eq.(A3) of motion for the junction phase can be rewritten in terms of dimensionless parameters as

$$Q_0^2 \frac{d^2\phi}{dt'^2} + \frac{d\phi}{dt'} + \sin \phi = i + i_n, \quad (A5)$$

where $Q_0 = (2eI_{c0}R_J^2C/\hbar)^{1/2}$ is the quality factor of the linearized equation of motion, $i = I/I_{c0}$, $i_n = I_n/I_{c0}$, and $t' = (2eI_{c0}R_J/\hbar)t$ is the normalized time. The term $\frac{d\phi}{dt'}$ is damping as it breaks the time-reversibility of the equation and introduces dissipation. The strength of damping is proportional to $1/R_J$ and is inversely related to the quality factor. In this notation, the time-averaged steady-state voltage across the junction, $V = I_{c0}R_J \langle d\phi/dt' \rangle_{t'}$. The noise correlation in the scaled time, $\langle i_n(t'_1) i_n(t'_2) \rangle = (4ek_B T_W / \hbar I_{c0}) \delta(t'_1 - t'_2)$. The usual McCumber parameter $\beta_c = Q_0^2$ and Stewart parameter $\omega_0 \tau = Q_0$ with $\omega_0 = \sqrt{2eI_{c0}/\hbar C}$ and $\tau = R_J C$. For the circuit in Fig.8 we replace R_J in Eq.(A3) by R_T where $1/R_T = 1/R_W + 1/R_S$. Then we derive either Eq.(4.1) or Eq.(4.4) following the similar steps to get Eq.(A5) from Eq.(A3).

In the absence of thermal current noise I_n at zero temperature (also neglecting quantum fluctuations), the zero-voltage state or 0 state is stable at all bias levels less than the ideal critical current ($|i| < 1$), and the voltage state or 1 state is stable at all bias levels greater than a minimum value designated by a fluctuation free re-trapping current i_{r0} . The value of i_{r0} ($\equiv I_{r0}/I_{c0}$) is determined entirely by the quality factor Q_0 and decreases

with increasing Q_0 as a smaller tilt is sufficient to support the running (finite voltage) state when damping is less. For $Q_0 < 0.8382$, the damping is sufficient that a running state is not possible unless the potential decreases monotonically and in this case $i_{r0} = 1$. For $Q_0 > 0.8382$, a running state is possible even when the potential has local minima. [70] In this case $i_{r0} < 1$ and the V - I curve is hysteretic. In the limit of large Q_0 , $i_{r0} = 4/\pi Q_0$ ($Q_0 > 3$). [48, 70]

The phase dynamics described in Eq.(A5) can be visualized as the damped motion of a Brownian particle in the tilted washboard potential $U(\phi) = -(i\phi + \cos\phi)$. In the under-damped regime $Q_0 > 1$, the zero-voltage state and the resistive state correspond to the particle trapped by the energy barrier ΔU and running downward along the tilted potential, respectively. Escape from the potential (0 state to 1 state) can occur even for $i < 1$ due to the thermal and the quantum fluctuations.

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